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**English national character vs. Russian national character: stereotypes**

Final project

(“The world of Britain” course)

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**Introduction**

To begin with, it’s worth mentioning that the attempt to define a national character is a matter of very great difficulty. First of all, if you are to define or compare a nation as a whole, you will inevitably generalize your own experience (I mean your own experience dealing with several representatives and making any conclusions towards all the nation) which sometimes might have nothing to do with the very reality or, at least, significantly distorts a real picture. In addition, a nation character is a subtle combination of individual characters, which can not be defined only due to the last ones. There is always something more to it. In other words, it’s hardly possible to compare any nations from a scientific perspective otherwise you will necessarily resort to subjectivism, speculations of any kind and demagogy.

Picture 1. Nikolay Berdyaev, a Russian thinker, well known for his essays "The Origin of Russian Communism", "The Russian idea" eager to find out a development path for Russia culture.

However, who’s to say that it’s not worth doing? Many of essays dedicated to such a matter are extremely interesting and definitely has a cognitive value. In this regard, there are a whole bunch of authors I would strongly recommend everybody to get familiar with. From Nikolay Berdyaev, a famous Russian philosopher with his in-depth analysis of Russian identity, to Kate Fox or James Billlington whose book called «The Icon and the Axe» made a lot of buzz in its time. This book is nothing but an utterly curious outsider's perspective on Russian culture.

Now, we are willing to make an effort to work out this problem and examine some essential features regarding to both self-awareness and stereotypes of two countries. We will try to make our own research, taking into account some geographical, historical, religious aspects of English and Russian nations that might shed light on their national characters.

Fedor Tyutchev. “Russia is not to be understood by intellectual processes. You can’t take her measurements with a common yardstick, she has a form and stature of her own: you can only believe in it ”

**The Russian**

England is usually called «Merry, old England» implying that the English are supposed to be rather conservative, traditions are usually followed, “La belle France” unambiguously hints at beauty of everything that might relate to this country- “French charm”, “French style”. ”“Святая Русь” is meant to underline the spirituality based on orthodox values.

The above-mentioned Nikolay Berdyaev in his book called “Russian idea” rightly argued that “The Russian are a people in the highest degree polarized: they are a conglomeration of contradictions. One can be charmed by them, one can be disillusioned. The unexpected is always to be expected from them. The inconsistency and the complexity of Russia soul might be due to the fact that in Russia two streams of world history –East and West jostle and influence one another. The Russian people are neither purely European nor purely Asiatic. Russia is a complete section of the world – a colossal East-West. It unites two worlds, and within the Russian soul two principles are always engaged in strife -the Eastern and the Western ". It might sound rather pompous nowadays and the very idea of “being in the middle of the East and West” seems rather an idealistic propaganda concept but it doesn’t change the fact that it’s based on true facts, especially if you look at the Russia’s elite origin. Many bloods and elements were mixed there.

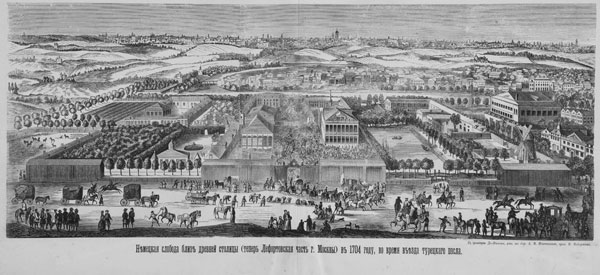
In this regard, let’s consider what Russian identity is supposed to be. Historically, a Russian was considered the one who accepted the orthodox. Thus, more than one third of Russian nobility before revolution used to be Tatars. It’s well known that the richest, the most powerful families had the tatarian roots- the Yousupoffs, the Meshersky , the Urusoffs, the Karamzins (We can see the moon on their family crest as the evidence of their Muslim roots). Some of the families with tatarian roots were not so influential but we remember them due to the remarkable representatives – The Turgenevs, the Kuprins, the Nabokovs. According to some versions, Fedor Michaelovich Dostoevsky is also believed to be a descendant of a mirza called Aslan Chelebi. Therefore, a famous statement “Scratch a Russian and you'll find a Tatar” is not far off. Both Pushkin and Zhukovsky , the pearls of Russian poetry, are also known to be half-breeds with the father from Ethiopia( Pushkin) and the mother from Turkey(Zhukovsky). Another equally important part of Russian rulling class made up the Germans. First of all , it’s worth mentioning that the German blood flew the veins of our royal family since the very beginning. Rurik is alleged to have come either from nowadays Denmark or from Sweden, anyway he belonged to any Norse (in Russia usually called German-Scandinavian) tribes densely populated the North Europe that time.

Alexandr Kuprin, a famous Russian writer , typical representative of a decayed noble family with tatar roots

Felix Yousupoff , Russian aristocrat, belonged to one of the richest noble family in Russia

The impact of Germans is particularly noticeable during Peter the Great’s epoch when people mainly from the German states were invited massively to Russia. The military engineers, merchants, artisans were particularly priced because of the war taking place against Sweden. So-called “German quarters” emerged in Moscow, for instance, the Lefortovo district or Baumanskaya were used to be populated by foreigners, but germans made up the majority of them. It should be noted that during the Peter’s reign many sectors of economy like mining, steel and weapon industry were advanced considerably due to Germans.

Anna Io



Lefortovo, the residence of many foreigners

The main part of health facilities , educational institutions in Moscow and Saint –Petersburg were launched under the supervision and participation of Germans. The members of Russian Academy of Sciences were mostly Germans that’s why Lomonosov raged against it criticizing them for making up «Normans theory» according to which the Slavic tribes weren’t able to reign successfully and wise rulers needed calling from abroad. Therefore, the role of Germans in Russian history can hardly be overestimated.

Michailo Lomonosov

Now, finally we can see that Berdyaev’s words about “Eastern and Wester streams” are at least historically justified. In addition, reflection on national identity led into forming two main ideological systems called “Slavophils” and “Westernizers” with sharply different ideas confronting throughout the 18th and 19th century about where Russia should make a step forward , what is to be done , what place does it occupy in the world?

Frankly speaking, this dispute hasn’t stopped yet and I tend to think that the very idea of identification choice has taken roots to us so deeply that it has become an inseparable trait of our national character indeed. We do tend to run into these two extremes. We can easily make out these opposite tendencies in the last two epochs, I mean the Eltsin’s and the Putin’s ones. Using a huge media source the first one urged us to adopt traditional western values, the second one desperately appeal to patriotism sometimes in rather vulgar way. Sometimes it feels that it’s about time to show up our “Asiatic mug” to all the world and to feel proud of it. Unfortunately, some people perceive it exactly this way, some programs on TV are starting to feel like «Two Minutes Hate» from famous Orwell’s “1984”. As for me, I do not support either of these extremes.

Boris Eltsin

Russia is traditionally perceived as a generous nation due to the enormous area and resources of its country. It’s hardly surprising that unlike Russia , England as well as any other European states has a limited area which inevitably breeds a particular attitude to people, they tend to be abundantly reasonable sometimes even rather restrained.

One of the main virtue according to orthodox rule is a great ability to be patient no matter what happened and the Russian tend to follow this guideline. However, if the Russian happen to run out the patience, the gin will be out of bottle. It’s well known what this genie is capable for. Pushkin aptly observed it in his “captain’s daughter” saying

**The English**

English national character has been formed country's richest history, its traditions, habits of behavior; It is a reflection of the characteristics of its climate, nature, geographic features. To describe English character is not easy either, you risk describing the whole history. However, we at least try to define some of their features separately.

One of the main feature, which can’t help being noticed is that the English are conservative whatever they do in everything they do. In this regard, a famous American historian, a specialist in US history, author of the well-known book "American Mind" Henry Steele Commander, since 1961, he lectured on American history in Oxford, Cambridge and London. As a result of his visits to Great Britain, a voluminous book, The American View of England, appeared, in which the works of American authors about England where he said

Henry Steele Commander. The author of “American mind”

"The national character is tenacious in many countries. But this does not apply to any people to a greater extent than to the English, who seem to have a patent on the vitality of their nature. One of the most distinctive features of the English is the constancy and stability of their character. When it comes to terrible trial or a flood, the Englishman will remain an unruffled Englishman. The English are less than other nations exposed to undercurrents and whirlpools of history. They are less reacting to changes in fashion, be it food, clothing or literature. Nothing will make him change his world or show impoliteness to the guests, just as nothing will break his habits.

English national character has highly been shaped by the English nature. A main hallmark of English nature is that it is extremely different for such a tiny country. The landscape is changed sharply. The English nature can’t be compared with the Russian one. It’s sharply different. The mountains are relatively low, rivers are quite narrow but all of them are used for transport means.

The Severne, the longest river in England

The nature of England, with its unique landscape is the soil in which grow the roots that connect the British with their country. England is a green country. It because of the need for the extension of grazing lands have preserved little forest, there were only trees and prickly shrubs that serve as boundaries of land holdings, and small groves of trees near private homes and villages. But there is a lot of grass, which remains green all year round. The cult of grass — one of the remarkable features of the English character. No matter how small a piece of land is , it is usually regularly trimmed and cultivated, until he turns into a green carpet. Gardening is the national hobby of the British and they are supposed to be wonderful gardeners. Much leisure time is spent in individualistic pursuits, of which the most popular is gardening. Most English people love gardens, their own above all, and this is probably one reason why so many people prefer to live in houses rather than flats.

The English sense and feeling for privacy is notorious. England is the land of brick fences and stone walls (often with glass embedded along the top), of hedges, of thick draperies at all the windows, and reluctant introductions, but nothing is stable now. English people rarely shake hands except when being introduced to someone for the first time. They hardly ever shake hands with their friends except seeing them after a long interval or saying good-bye before a long journey.   
Snobbery is not so common in England today as it was at the beginning of the 19th century. It still exists, and advertisers know how to use it in order to sell their goods. The advertisers are very clever in their use of snobbery. Motorcar manufactures, for example, advertise the colour of their cars as “Embassy Black” or “Balmoral Stone”. Embassy black is plain, ordinary black, but the name suggests diplomats and all the social impor tance that surrounds them, and this is what the snobs need.   
Most people in Britain work a five-day week, from Monday to Friday; schools, colleges and universities are also closed on Saturdays and Sundays. As Friday comes along, as people leave work they say to each other, “Have a nice week-end.” Then on Monday morning they ask, “Did you have a nice week-end?”   
  
 On Sunday mid-mornings most British people indulge in some fairly light activities such as gardening, washing the car, shelling peas or chopping mint for Sunday lunch, or taking the dog for a walk. Another most popular pre-lunch activity consists of a visit to a “pub” – either a walk to the “local”, or often nowadays a drive to a more pleasant “country pub” if one lives in a built-up area. The national drink in England is beer, and the “pub”, where Englishmen go to drink to, is a peculiarly English institution.   
The British people are the world’s greatest tea drinkers. They drink a quarter of all the tea grown in the world each year. Many of them drink tea on at least eight different occasions during the day.   
The working people of Britain have had a long tradition of democracy, not so much in the sense of creating formal institutions, but in the active sense of popular cooperation to uphold the will of the people.

Scafell-pike, the highest mountain in England

**Conclusion**

To summarize, It’s important to note that each country has a rich history and culture. If you are to understand their characters, you will inevitably have to get to the bottom of their history. It can’t be learnt separately. National character is manifested not only in behavior, traditions, language, but in more complex phenomena of culture: education, philosophy, literature, politics, intercultural relations and contacts.

Russian mindset is based on the idea of uniqueness of being on the crossroads of civilizations. We are Europeans and Asians at the same time, so two steams of world history –East and West jostle and influence one each other. That should be bear in mind if you deal with Russian.

Many features of English national character discussed above, is reflected not only in everyday behavior but also in literature and poetry. Eccentricity, penchant for humor, a passion for travel, the search for utopias, paradoxically combined with practicality and sobriety, is distinguished English literature, classical and modern. All this, in our opinion, makes the study of English literature an important subject of cultural studies.

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